

We Must Not Run from God's Assignments

Message 1 of 4 in the series: "Jonah: How to NOT Be the Worst Evangelist Ever!"

A. Jesus wants us to tell everyone, everywhere the Good News.

"Go into all the world and **preach the Good News to everyone.**" Mark 16:15b (NLT)

"But **you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you.** And you will be my witnesses, **telling people about me everywhere**—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." Acts 1:8 (NLT)

"Good News" = "gospel" = "euangelion" (NT Greek).

B. When the OT prophet Jonah ran as far as he could from the assignment God had given him, he provided a powerful example of how to be the worst evangelist ever.

"The Lord gave this message to Jonah son of Amittai: 'Get up and go to the great city of Nineveh. **Announce my judgment against it because I have seen how wicked its people are.**' But Jonah got up and went in the opposite direction to get away from the Lord. He went down to the port of Joppa, where he found a ship leaving for Tarshish. He bought a ticket and went on board, **hoping to escape from the Lord by sailing to Tarshish.**" Jonah 1:1-3 (NLT)

Note: God told Jonah to go to Ninevah located 500 miles northeast of Israel. Instead, Jonah boarded a ship headed to Tarshish, located 2,000 miles to the west.

Note: Jonah didn't want to warn the Ninevites about God's impending judgment because he hated the wicked Ninevites and wanted God to wipe them out. "**What sorrow awaits Nineveh, the city of murder and lies!** She is crammed with wealth and is never without victims... There are countless casualties, heaps of bodies—so many bodies that people stumble over them. All this because Nineveh, the beautiful and faithless city, mistress of deadly charms, enticed the nations with her beauty. She taught them all her magic, enchanting people everywhere." Nahum 3:1-4 (NLT)

IMPORTANT! God loves wicked, sinful people (even if we don't), and He wants them to repent. "Do you think that I like to see wicked people die? says the Sovereign Lord. **Of course not! I want them to turn from their wicked ways and live.**" Ezekiel 18:23 (NLT)

"The Lord isn't really being slow about his promise (to return), as some people think. No, he is being patient for your sake. **He does not want anyone to be destroyed but wants everyone to repent.**"

2 Peter 3:9 (NLT)

C. The Lord sent a powerful storm that threatened to sink the ship in which Jonah was sound asleep.

"But the Lord hurled a powerful wind over the sea, causing a violent storm that threatened to break the ship apart. **Fearing for their lives, the desperate sailors shouted to their gods for help and threw the cargo overboard to lighten the ship.** But all this time Jonah was sound asleep down in the hold. So the captain went down after him. '**How can you sleep at a time like this?**' he shouted. '**Get up and pray to your god!** Maybe he will pay attention to us and spare our lives.' Then **the crew cast lots to see which of them had offended the gods and caused the terrible storm. When they did this, the lots identified Jonah** as the culprit. 'Why has this awful storm come down on us?' they demanded. 'Who are you? What is your line of work? What country are you from? What is your nationality?' Jonah answered, '**I am a Hebrew, and I worship the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the land.**' The sailors were terrified when they heard this, for he had already told them he was running away from the Lord. '**Oh, why did you do it?**' they groaned." Jonah 1:4-10 (NLT)

IMPORTANT! Attempting to run away from God's assignments is foolish because God knows everything, sees everything, and is present everywhere, all the time. "**Can anyone hide from me in a secret place? Am I not everywhere in all the heavens and earth?**" says the Lord." Jeremiah 23:24 (NLT)

"The lot is cast into the lap, but **its every decision is from the Lord.**" Proverbs 16:33 (NIV)

IMPORTANT! Sin (deliberate, determined independence from God) will put us to sleep spiritually and blind us to the seriousness of our actions/circumstances. "You will say, 'How I hated discipline! If only I had not ignored all the warnings! Oh, **why didn't I listen** to my teachers? Why didn't I pay attention to my instructors? **I have come to the brink of utter ruin,** and now I must face public disgrace.'" Proverbs 5:12-14 (NLT)

IMPORTANT! When we rebel against God, our sin always has consequences that impact others. “Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. **Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction**; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.” Galatians 6:7-8 (NIV)

IMPORTANT! God used a pagan ship captain to wake up His rebellious prophet and remind him to pray and pagan sailors to rebuke him for trying to run away from God. “Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.” Ephesians 5:14b (NIV)

D. Jonah realized he was responsible for the storm and told the sailors to throw him into the sea.

“And since the storm was getting worse all the time, they asked him, ‘What should we do to you to stop this storm?’ **‘Throw me into the sea,’ Jonah said, ‘and it will become calm again. I know that this terrible storm is all my fault.’** Instead, the sailors rowed even harder to get the ship to the land. But the stormy sea was too violent for them, and they couldn’t make it. Then they cried out to the Lord, Jonah’s God. ‘O Lord,’ they pleaded, ‘don’t make us die for this man’s sin. And don’t hold us responsible for his death. O Lord, you have sent this storm upon him for your own good reasons.’ Then the sailors picked Jonah up and threw him into the raging sea, and the storm stopped at once! **The sailors were awestruck by the Lord’s great power, and they offered him a sacrifice and vowed to serve him.** Now the Lord had arranged for a great fish to swallow Jonah. And Jonah was inside the fish for three days and three nights.” Jonah 1:11-17 (NLT)

Note: Ironically, the pagan sailors cared more about saving Jonah’s life than Jonah cared about saving his own life or the entire city of Ninevah. “I knew that you are a merciful and compassionate God, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love. You are eager to turn back from destroying people. **Just kill me now, Lord! I’d rather be dead than alive if what I predicted will not happen.**” Jonah 4:2b-3 (NLT)

IMPORTANT! Amazingly, God used even Jonah’s foolish act of rebellion to make Himself known to the awe-struck sailors. “...you meant evil against me; **but God meant it for good...**” Genesis 50:20b (NKJV)

IMPORTANT! In order for us to NOT be the worst evangelists ever, we must NOT run away from God’s assignments. “For ‘Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’ But how can they call on him to save them unless they believe in him? And **how can they believe in him if they have never heard about him? And how can they hear about him unless someone tells them?** And how will anyone go and tell them without being sent? That is why the Scriptures say, **‘How beautiful are the feet of messengers who bring good news!’**” Romans 10:13-15 (NLT) (*Joel 2:32*) (*Isaiah 52:7*)

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Connect Group Discussion Questions:

Read Jonah 1, and then discuss the following questions:

1. Read Mark 16:15 and Acts 1:8. What part do ordinary Christians play in sharing the Good News of Jesus? Isn’t evangelism best left to pastors, missionaries, and professional evangelists? How do we work together to spread the Good News?
2. Why do you think Jonah went as far as he could in the opposite direction when God sent him to Ninevah? (Jonah 4:1-3)
3. As a group, pray the Lord’s Prayer together. “Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.” Why did Jesus tell us to pray that God would forgive us to the same extent we forgive others? (Matthew 6:14-15)
4. Discuss the following statements:
 - God loves wicked, sinful people (even if we don’t), and He wants them to repent. (Ezekiel 18:23, 2 Peter 3:9)
 - Attempting to run away from God’s assignments is foolish because God knows everything, sees everything, and is present everywhere, all the time. (Jeremiah 23:24, Psalm 139:7-12)
 - Sin (deliberate, determined independence from God) will put us to sleep spiritually and blind us to the seriousness of our actions/circumstances. (Proverbs 5:12-14, Ephesians 5:14)

- When we rebel against God, our sin always has consequences that impact others. (Galatians 6:7-8)
 - Amazingly, God used even Jonah's foolish act of rebellion to make Himself known to the awe-struck sailors. (Genesis 50:20, Romans 8:28)
 - In order for us to NOT be the worst evangelists ever, we must NOT run away from God's assignments. (Romans 10:13-15, Joel 2:32, Isaiah 52:7)
5. Close your meeting by praying for our church. Ask God to give us the desire and the power to tell others the Good News. (Philippians 2:13). Ask Him also to give us the courage we need to carry out the assignments He has for us so we won't run away like Jonah.